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ABSTRACT

Efforts to bring pre-service and in-service teacher education together need to include changes in the ways educators think about student teaching, teachers, and schools. They need to move from the student teaching as bridge, teachers as artisan, and schools as facilities for production metaphors. Instead they need to change their thinking to see teaching as an ever changing inquiring, problem-solving endeavor, and to see schools as learning communities directly and concretely connected with the university as a learning community. Several factors can inhibit establishing such a vision. The first, inertia, can be overcome only by convincing individuals to participate in change for reasons with which they can personally identify. Organizational and structural obstacles to change require uncalculated work and personal effort often poured into simply making things work. Personal and attitudinal resistance to change among faculty is a serious obstacle which some faculty will not overcome. There must be a mechanism for these individuals to choose not to participate as well as a means for others to drop out in a face-saving way. Errors in perception and conception of the meaning of the change must also be anticipated. A final inhibitor is the time and energy required of large-scale substantial change and these demands must be anticipated and provided for. (JB)

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Building and Sustaining School-University Collaborative Learning Communities: Overcoming Potential Inhibiting Factors

American Association
of Colleges for Teacher Education
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Background and Context

I believe that, for the most part, teacher education in the United States is divided into two stages: teacher preparation conducted on college and university campuses, and in-service teacher education conducted by school systems. I like to call this arrangement a *two-stage-plus-bridge* phenomenon. Stage one is the pre-service, on-campus instruction (sometimes with practice) provided for teacher education students; and stage two involves the early years (and sometimes later years as well) on the job in the "real" classroom. Firmly placed between the two stages is a pivotal connection, a bridge, which is called student teaching and/or, in recent times, an internship. In the traditional ways of doing things, the bridge is not a stage by itself but a transition that includes elements of the two stages. During that transition student and program priorities gradually shift from the "getting ready to teach" aspects of stage one to the "real teaching" of the newly employed teacher of stage two.

Experiences associated with the bridge include "field-based" instruction, guided practice, and closely supervised trial and error experimentation. In recent times, a new concoction called "induction" has been added to the mix.

Improvements in teacher preparation over the last decade or two, especially induction efforts, have tended to focus to a great extent on the bridge, sometimes to the near neglect of at least some elements of both stage one and stage two, and have stressed how those in charge of stage one and stage two could work together better to ensure a better *transition* between campus instruction and the life of a successful teacher. In essence, the improvements involve cooperation by the decision-makers at both ends of the bridge and in the managing of the one-way flow of student teachers from campus to classroom.

Unlike in other nations where teacher preparation is still tied closely to a training process controlled by school officials and conducted by experienced teachers who have been "promoted to their teacher preparation" assignments from direct responsibilities in pre-K–12 classrooms, efforts to bring U. S. pre-service and in-service education together seem to be restricted by at least three metaphors: the bridge metaphor mentioned above as well as by two other similarly restricting conceptualizations. The two additional conceptualizations are (1) that which sees *teaching* as a craft to be learned by artisans practicing under the guidance of masters; and (2) that which characterizes the *school*, as a facility of production, the products of which are knowledgeable and skilled students.

Toward Developing Learning Communities

It seems to me that serious education reform efforts in the U. S. that try to bring university teacher preparation and in-service continuing teacher education together need to include changes in the ways educators think about student teaching, teachers, and schools. Educators need to change their thinking away from the *student teaching as bridge, teachers as artisan,* and *schools as facilities for production* metaphors.

Instead educators need to rethink teaching, schools, and the bridge as follows:

(1) They need to see *teaching* as an ever-changing inquiring, problem-solving, scholarly endeavor conducted by intelligent, knowledgeable, analytical, reflective-thinking, decisive, and effective-managing individuals who also care deeply about their students and about what they do to and for them; and who see their task as that of making children into well-informed, intelligent, skilled, and sensitive human beings. Teaching must be thought of as much more

than a craft passed on from master to artisan; and teachers must be thought of as intelligent conceptualizers who are capable of formulating theories from their practical experiences. Much more could be said about these points, but I will leave doing so in another paper.

(2) They need to see *schools* as learning communities, as places of inquiry, reflection, analysis, knowing, deciding, and action; places where everyone is learning, including teachers who are constantly gaining knowledge about teaching, about the content they teach, and about their students. Schools must be thought of as places where teachers evolve practice-based theories, rather than simply as places where those who have already learned (in college) all they need to know and now teach only what they already know.

Students in these schools must not be seen as products who simply possess more information, better skills, and additional values perspectives and sensitivities. Students and their learning must be thought of in more complex terms. Students must be seen as, and actually be, active learners who are only being launched on an intellectual journey toward becoming learned, more complete, and more authentic individuals.

(3) The *bridge* must be dismantled and the "gap" that it has spanned for so many years must be filled in so that a contiguous landform connects pre-service teacher education with the entire professional life for all teachers. That landform must be seen as a continuous learning community that is made up of equally respected professionals who posses different but equally valued knowledge and competencies and who contribute different but equally valued perspectives.

As I envision such a *learning community* made up of university and school people working together, I think it would have at least three basic and necessary characteristics.

The first of these would be the *direct participation of many more people* than students, teachers school administrators, and the traditional support staff of custodians, cafeteria workers, and the like who are now usually found in schools. Learning community schools would also include teacher education students, teacher educators, anyone who can provide help to *students* beyond that provided by teachers (social workers, community agency employees, employers of students who work, health care providers, "big brothers" and "big sisters," parents and families of students, and so forth), and anyone who can provide assistance and support to *teachers* (librarians, community experts, local college professors and staff members, public media employees, suppliers of materials, equipment, information, and other resources).

A second basic characteristic would be the *differentiation of roles* among all the participants. Everyone in the mix might do the work traditionally assigned to only one type of role player. Although in most of my versions of learning community schools, teachers would be the most prominent decision-makers, administrators would sometimes decide among various teacher-held points of view when there is no consensus or when the question being addressed is not important enough to involve a number of individuals. Parents, teachers, education students, experts from the community, and specialists on television would teach lessons while the regular teachers prepare for future lessons. That preparation would occur on school time and might take place in the back of the room, in an office down the hall, at a local library or resource center, or by attending a class on a college campus. The key point concerning what the different people do would not be defined by their preset roles but by what would produce the best learning for the students.

A third basic characteristic would be that *everyone is always learning* regardless of their primary role in the operation. Of course, some people would be counted on to know more and possess

more expertise in certain areas than others, but everyone would still be learning. Teachers and all the other role-players would not be expected to know how to deal with every problem, but they would be expected to try to find out what to do and then apply what they learn.

In this context, everyone in learning community schools would be have the power (if that is an accurate enough term) to be a full-fledged participant. Everyone would teach, everyone manage, everyone solve problems, everyone identify and uncover new knowledge and resources needed for the school to accomplish its purposes. The single goal would be the best possible learning for the school's students; what various people would do to accomplish that goal would be of little importance. So, *teacher empowerment, site-based management*, and a number of concepts embodied in *Total Quality Management* all would occur naturally as a normal part of the process of getting the job done. No one would have to give power to teachers. They would have it because of what they know, the skills they possess, and their willingness to exercise the responsibilities that are already theirs. No one from a central authority would have to award management responsibilities to the school "site," the learning community would assume authority and exercises it. However, the central authority would have to stay out of they way – not an easy condition to achieve for school systems steeped in years of top-down modes of operation. In addition, college-level educators would be involved directly, not just with teachers in in-service programs, but with students as well. They would come to learn and formulate practice-based theories, not only to tell others what they already know.

In sum, the learning community idea could be described in words associated with the *Total Quality Management* concept. Students are the clients; their learning is the goal; teachers are the first line of service providers; everyone else, those inside the educational system and those outside but available to it, are support staff for the enterprise. There are noticeably fewer rules about what can and cannot be done to educate the students, more incentives to seek unique types of help and resources, a spirit of experimentation, and a freedom and security among teachers and teacher educators to try new things and to use their own best judgment.

Currently in the United States, while many school and teacher education preparation programs remain unchanged from years ago, there is much talk about and some serious movement on all of the above points. Numerous efforts are underway to "close the university-schools gap," at least in theory and on paper, if not in reality; and many of the real efforts at doing so are actually succeeding at least partially. In addition, some progress toward school learning communities is actually being made in a number of settings.

But, with endeavors that attempt to change as much as these do and, in particular, attempt to change as many people's roles as these do, there are of course, inhibiting factors. Some of those factors are the focus of the remainder of these comments. In these comments, I have tried to identify several categories of factors and circumstances that inhibit major changes in education, as I interpret them. Although the factors apply more broadly than to school-university collaborative efforts alone, my personal view of each category was developed in my study of and participation in those types of efforts. In describing my categories, I ask for your reactions and suggestions. Specific questions that I wish to raise of you are:

- Are these categories of inhibiting factors and circumstances accurate?
- Are they specific to school-university collaborative efforts or more general?
- Are they specific to circumstances in the United States rather than applicable across national borders?
- Are the explanations valid?
- Are there other inhibiting factors and circumstances that should be added to the list?

Categories of Inhibiting Factors and Circumstances

Inertia – Dynamics

It is probably a basic fact of human behavior that much of what people do in all aspects of their lives is done because of the routines that they have developed for their day-to-day activity. They do things the way they did them yesterday for at least three reasons: (1) things worked out fine yesterday, (2) there is no reason to change, and (3) any change would require extra effort, thought, and risk.

The same phenomena can also be attributed to groups of people who work together and to the organizations within which they work. These groups and organizations include university faculty, school teachers, university departments, and school organizations. In these contexts the questions raised when educational change is proposed, particularly wide-spread and radical change, are, *Why do that? Aren't we doing well now?* For most situations, the answers to these questions that are supplied by those who want change are likely to be, "Yes, what we are doing now is fine, but we could be doing more, could be doing it better, or could be doing something else." This, in turn, typically prompts a subsequent question, *But why should we change?* This latter question illustrates the inertia-dynamic inhibiting circumstance. People and organizations need convincing reasons for changing from their comfortable routines.

In school-university change efforts in which I have played a role, reasons for changing are necessary all of the time – to get potential participants' initial attention, to convince them to participate, to encourage them to continue and to do so wholeheartedly. The reasons have to be real and ones with which individuals identify personally. Reasons such as *for the good of the students* or *because we could do better* tend not to be concrete or specific enough to be convincing.

Even when individuals decide initially to participate, incentives that sustain their interest and participation must be repeated periodically. Doing something that counters comfortable routines is not an easy path, and encouragement is required.

Organizational – Structural

As was hinted above, just as with individuals, the organizations and institutions within which we all work have their own structural inertia. Things are done in certain ways and those ways are expected. When change requires modification and adjustments, the adjustments have ripple effects and create surprise. Sometimes, those ripples bump against institutional "ways of doing things" and rules that are difficult or impossible to change or ignore.

Some of these situations seem insignificant but they have big impacts. For example, when university faculty members are in pre-K–12 schools for half of their academic load, they are not likely to be as available as usual for campus meetings, office hours, casual conversations with peers, and phone calls. Besides, commuting between two places of work is time-consuming and bothersome. Other situations create much bigger problems: How is a faculty member's pay affected if part is paid by the university and part by the schools? How is work with schools calculated in the university reward system? If unusual agreements are made this year, will they be understood and accepted in the future, particularly at promotion and retirement time? Similar situations impact upon pre-K–12 teachers who engage in university work: Who is teaching the students if a teacher is at a university meeting or teaching a university class? Is the substitute instructor good enough? Will parents be concerned? Will the students miss something because two teachers try to do the teaching usually done by one?

Doing things differently requires adjustments that range widely within organizations and those adjustments involve people and officials not directly tied to the change effort. Because of this effect, potential problems need to be anticipated and those not anticipated need to be addressed. People who have their routines upset need to be attended to, asked for favors, and supplied with apologies. They need to be asked for exceptions and extra work, and to be thanked. Often, those who have to ask for the favors and provide the apologies have to do so on a personal basis and rely on personal friendships, even though the situation is not of their making and no one's fault.

As a result of organizational and structural routines and expectations in universities and schools, special university-school collaborative projects that I know about have to allot time and energy to *making things work.* These efforts require chores well beyond the actual scope of the endeavor and include the use of personal relationships and status that are rarely calculated in the costs of operation. But they do take a toll. At some point, those trying to make the system accommodate the program's needs simply wear down from pushing so much and become reluctant to do so any more. At times, they have asked for more favors than they have a right to ask. At times, those whom they consistently ask to help tire and say "no."

Personal – Attitudinal

Doing things differently and asking others to do things differently are not as comfortable to individuals as leaving things as they are, as is implied above. Therefore, some people simply are not likely to change for any reason and others are not likely to do so without very strong motivation. Reasons for this phenomenon are numerous, including the inertia and organizational factors already described. Others have to do with personality (some individuals are not risk takers); others have to do with personal circumstances (family pressures leave only a limited amount of time and energy for professional activity, and changes are likely to require more of both); and others have to do with the fact that individuals who would be affected by and involved in change simply like things the way they are and believe any change will more likely cause harm than improvement.

If these individuals need to be included in an educational change effort either because they are involved directly in what is to be changed or their cooperation is necessary, they must be convinced to change their minds and their attitudes. They need to agree to participate or, at the least, to agree not to obstruct. Their change of heart must be genuine and be the result of honest convincing. Those who reluctantly concede or who are pressured or tricked into agreeing are likely to have second thoughts and cause problems later as the effort proceeds.

Sometimes reluctance does not surface at the start of a change effort. The ideas sound good, the goals are admirable, the amount of commitment and effort needed is understated. Besides, everyone else, so it seems, is going to participate. Only later, reality sets in. The initial changes lead to others that were not anticipated, the ripple effect mentioned above becomes more apparent and less manageable. Adjustments that seemed to be rather simple turn out to be complex. More time and energy is required and both must be taken from the time and energy usually devoted to more routine things, such as teaching students.

So, serious educational change requires a mechanism that allows individuals to choose *not* to participate as well as a means for others to drop out in a face-saving way. Given the need to motivate people to participate and to continue in an effort mentioned above, it is difficult to provide face-saving ways for those same individuals and colleagues to drop out. But, somehow, it must be done. Serious changes will not be successful if those who participate dislike their involvement and feel trapped.

Perceptual – Conceptual

Change, by its very nature, is movement from that which is more familiar to that which is less well understood. Because this is so, how people view and understand change in general, as well as the specific changes involved in a particular change effort, are important to them as participants and to the effort itself. The phenomenon is cognitive at its base, as well as attitudinal as described above.

Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), talks about people's inability to conceptualize truly changed circumstances because their ideas of the new are always encumbered by their views from the present. This idea is as valid for individuals as they approach a particular change effort as it is for people in general. When individuals decide to undertake an educational innovation, they base that decision on their present understanding of what would be involved. Typically, that understanding is limited at the start, possibly erroneous, then it changes as the person participates and learns more, and as the effort itself evolves.

People's perceptions and conceptualizations of an educational change, therefore, can have several inhibiting effects, such as (1) they could have an erroneous understanding of the effort and not participate or be an obstructionist based on that misunderstanding; (2) they could have an erroneous understanding of the effort and decide to participate only to find out things are not as they thought; (3) they could misassess the extent and pervasiveness of the effort; and (4) they could misunderstand their own role in the effort. Any of these misunderstandings and many others like them are likely to be serious inhibiting factors. The point I am making here, however, is *not* that there should not be any misunderstanding. There will be misunderstanding, but it must be anticipated and provided for as a normal aspect of any change process.

So, for educational change endeavors the size and extent of forging school-university collaborative efforts, errors in perception and conceptualization must be provided for. In addition, the evolution of participants' understanding of what they are about must be anticipated, accepted as normal, and fostered. This, of course, takes energy, understanding of the process, and interpersonal skill by the leaders of the effort. It also takes an enormous amount of time.

Time, Energy, and Hassle

All that has been described above illustrates the point that large-scale, substantial change consumes much time and energy of those directly involved, and, in the process, creates hassling circumstances for them. There are points at which they ask, *What did I get myself into*? *Why did I agree to do this*? These, assuredly, are inhibiting factors. They cause some people to avoid change, some to oppose it, some to play only minor roles, some to change their minds after beginning, and some to "burn out".

Somehow, the time, energy, and hassle of educational change efforts need to be anticipated and accommodated if the change is to succeed. Making these accommodations requires in itself time, energy, and hassle, for at least some of the participants.

Some Conclusions

As I reflect upon these five categories of inhibiting factors and circumstances, I notice several points that seem to be especially significant:

(1) All of the categories deal with change as a process and all are more general in their effect than educational change in particular.

(2) All are cultural and psychological in nature.

(3) All have many elements and facets; all of which interact; and, when they interact, their negative effects on change increases geometrically.

(4) All require much attention and expertise to be overcome.

I believe that if these observations are valid, there is an important message to be conveyed for school-university collaborative endeavors. That is, in essence, significant educational change needs to be thought of in much broader terms than just *educational change*, and how it is conducted must be undertaken based on this broader view. This means that for major educational changes such as the forging of school-university collaborative learning communities to succeed at least the following need to be elements of the endeavor:

- More than educators, teacher educators, and school system administrators need to be included at every stage of the process, including developing the initial idea – people with backgrounds and expertise in change, particularly in its cultural and psychological dimensions.

- The change process – how to do it – must receive as much attention as what is to be changed and accomplished.

- Process monitors need to be called on to help guide what happens and what should happen at critical points.

- Accomplishing the specific objectives of the effort cannot be considered the only goals of the endeavor. Instilling a positive stance toward change and installing a means for promoting future changes should also be major targets.

- Time, personnel, energy, and accommodation for frustration must be provided for as process elements of the endeavor simply because the process is so demanding of each.

Each of these points seems rather obvious but, in my experience, they are not elements or guiding principles of educational change, even for large scale projects. Instead, the educational goals of the endeavor seem to be the exclusive foci and only educators are involved significantly. The cultural and psychological aspects of the change process and the maintenance activities that keep the effort moving and on track are either ignored or assigned low priority. As a result, many good and significant educational changes never come to fruition because the change *process* is flawed.

Often, the suggestion that educators consider a major change in what they are doing – even when it is an obviously good idea – is met with resistance because past attempts at change were conducted poorly. No one wants to devote personal time, energy, and expertise to something that they believe will not succeed.